Opening Statement by Congressman Bart Stupak

Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment

"Progress Toward Improving Water Quality in the Great Lakes"

January 23, 2008

Thank you, Chairwoman Johnson, Chairman Oberster, and Ranking Member Duncan for holding this hearing. Water is a very important issue and it becomes even more important every day.

The recommended basic water requirement for human domestic needs is 13.2 gallons per person per day. Yet in the U.S. and Canada, the average person uses 100 gallons per person per day. Statistics show that in every 20 years, the demand for water is doubling.

In the Great Lakes, we consume about 5 percent and return about 95 percent of that water back into the Great Lakes Basin. In the arid western states they consume approximately 90 to 95 percent and return 5 to 10 percent back.

By 2025 the World Bank predicts that more than 3 billion people in 52 countries will suffer water shortages for drinking and sanitation. Water will be the most valuable and most sought after commodity in the world, and the wars of the 21st century will be fought over water, not oil.

Since coming to Congress, I have made it my mission to protect and promote the Great Lakes.

When I first arrived, NAFTA was the focus of the time and I raised the issue that Great Lakes water would become a commodity under the NAFTA agreement.

Since then we have stopped the Nova group from selling Great Lakes water to China, we've stopped the drilling for oil and gas in and under the Great Lakes, we've worked with the Great Lakes states to develop comprehensive water use programs, something we need to continue to urge, and we've stopped the discharge of partially treated human waste from being dumped into our lakes, rivers, and streams. To continue my mission to protect the Great Lakes, I became co-chair of the Water Caucus last year.

Why did we do all of these things?

45 million people depend on the Great Lakes for drinking water, jobs, transportation, and energy production. Without the Great Lakes, our water borne highway, there would be no domestic steel industry. Up to 180 million tons of cargo are shipped annually on the Great Lakes adding over $4 billion to our nation's economy. However, despite all these benefits, we have not invested nearly enough in this treasured resource and have left many challenges unaddressed.

In December 2004, a collaboration of federal, state, tribal, and local government officials and private sector stake holders formed a comprehensive strategy for restoring the Great Lakes called the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration. To implement this strategy, a bi-partisan group of Great

Lakes members introduced H.R. 1350 the Great Lakes Collaboration Implementation Act which I am a co-sponsor. The bill would authorize $23 billion over 5 years for combating invasive species, repairing our waste water treatment infrastructure, cleaning up pollution in sediment, water front restoration grants, and other important Great Lakes improvement projects.

As we have witnessed in recent months and in many elections, candidates running for President promise additional resources to protect the Great Lakes but unfortunately like President Bush, they fail to provide the resources necessary to improve the Great Lakes in their annual budgets. Nonetheless, I look forward to working with Members of this Committee to address these needs.

A major source of Great Lakes pollution is inadequate waste water treatment plants. Municipal wastewater treatment infrastructure in both the United States and Canada is old and deteriorating. Because many of these facilities are combined wastewater and storm water treatment facilities, storm events often over burden these systems, resulting in sewage overflow entering the Great Lakes.

It is no wonder why the EPA under this Administration has continually proposes to weaken regulations to allow for partially treated human sewage to be dumped into lakes, rivers, and streams. I stopped the EPA by passing an amendment to the Fiscal Year 2006 Interior APproprations Bill. Now we must provide the funding necessary to repair

our infrastructure to prevent all untreated discharges into the Great Lakes.

Phosphorus is another pollutant that has caused excessive harm to the Great Lakes through runoff. It is important that while states like Michigan lead the way in banning phosphorous that we consider similar legislation at the federal level. Once phosphorous is discharged into the waterways, it causes excessive growth of algae, which robs the water of oxygen that fish need to survive.

In addition, the record low water levels in the Great Lakes reduce the lakes ability to flush out toxic substances and excessive levels of nutrients such as phosphorous, nitrogen, and other pollutants. This problem is significant when considering the slow outflow rates for most of the Great Lakes. For example, Lake Superior retains water for 191 years, Lake Michigan for 62 years, and Lake Huron for 31 years.

Many believe that human influences are to blame for the low water levels in the Great Lakes. However, I believe that in the overall Great Lakes ecosystem, our weather cycles are the largest cause of low water levels. Right now, the Great Lakes are experiencing moderate to severe drought conditions. The greatest loss of water occurs during the winter when the lakes do not freeze over and evaporation occurs. In 2006 and 2007 winter snow packs provided 60% less water than average.

While we can't control the weather, we should be working to stop all diversion from the Great Lakes. Diversion by the bottled water industry has had an increasingly negative effect, particularly on the ground water sources they extract from. Ground water replenishes the Great Lakes and is an important contributor to its sustainability. Groundwater alone makes up approximately 35% of Lake Michigan.

The Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River Basin Water Resources Compact would allow bottled water from the region to be classified as a "product" available for diversion. Once our Great Lakes water becomes a product or commodity, there will be significant international pressure on this resource. In fact, NAFTA and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) state that no country can prohibit the export of water once it becomes a commodity.

The bottled water loophole in the Compact is a significant diversion of groundwater, and would allow companies to make money at the expense of our treasured resource. The Great Lakes are estimated to only replenish themselves by less than 1% per year while we currently consume 5% per year. Any comprehensive water use plan is insufficient without this prohibition on bottled water extraction.

The Beverage Marketing Corp. estimated that the U.S. consumed 8.2 billion gallons of bottled water in 2006, 3 billion gallons more than 2001. With the net profit of the bottled water industry in the billions, the drive to extract more from the Great Lakes for commercial gain will

increase. The problems associated with our low water levels will only become worse.

Lastly, invasive species has become the greatest immediate threat to the Great Lakes economy. Zebra mussels, asian carp, and 181 other known aquatic terrestrial non-native species reside in the Great Lakes basin. Approximately ten percent of them are considered invasive and are harming one of the major economic aspects of the Great Lakes, commercial and sports fishing.

Over 1/3 of the aquatic non-native species introduced into the Great Lakes are the result of ships discharging foreign ballast water. I urge the Committee to move swiftly and enact tougher ballast water regulations as they are essential to reducing the number of invasive species that are entering the Great Lakes.

Our Great Lakes face many challenges and I look forward to working with Members of this Committee and my Great Lakes colleagues to address these issues.

Thank you, Chairwoman Johnson and Chairman Oberstar for holding this hearing on this critical issue.